PALMERA

Gender Equality, Disability & Social Inclusion Policy

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Introduction

Palmera Projects (**Palmera**) strives for a world in which no one is left out. We recognise that this can only be achieved if *all* members of society have the full and equal opportunity and ability to participate in social and economic activities so as to improve their lives, and the lives of their families and communities. To achieve this goal, we must understand the ways in which people can be affected by (often intersecting) drivers of marginalisation and exclusion, and commit ourselves to adopting approaches and strategies to overcome these drivers in order to help communities meaningfully and sustainably lift themselves out of poverty.

Background

People suffer marginalisation and exclusion on the basis of (often intersecting) drivers of discrimination. These drivers include, but are not limited to, race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class or socio-economic status.

People who are subject to discrimination on these grounds face unique barriers to participation in social and economic activities and consistently suffer disproportionately worse social and economic outcomes than the rest of their communities. Their marginalisation and exclusion persist due to, amongst other things, a lack of understanding or respect for the human rights of all people regardless of their identities; the exclusion of vulnerable people from decision-making on issues affecting their interests; the unwillingness or inability to recognise, challenge and change entrenched stereotypes and attitudes towards vulnerable groups; and the failure to understand and address structural and power imbalances in society.

To address the inequalities and inequities faced by marginalised groups in a way that improves their social and economic outcomes, it is not enough to design targeted development programs for those groups—this often means only tackling the symptoms of marginalisation. It is also necessary to understand and address the root causes of discrimination and inequity within our organisation and through our work. In this holistic way, we can contribute to achieving meaningful, sustainable, *transformative* change for well-being and inclusive development.

Status of Policy

This Policy consolidates and replaces previous versions of Palmera's Policies on:

- Women in Development;

- Disability Inclusive Development;

- Human Rights in Development; and

- Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons,

    (each a **Prior Policy**).

Any reference to a Prior Policy in any document, policy, guidance of Palmera or any agreement entered into by Palmera (including agreements with Palmera Partners) will be taken as a reference to this Policy. This Policy will be disseminated to all Palmera Staff, volunteers, Board Members and Partner Staff.

Scope

This Policy applies to all of Palmera's activities. All Palmera Staff, volunteers, Board Members and Partner Staff are required to read and familiarise with this Policy.

Policy

Palmera is committed to:

1. respecting and promoting the human rights of all people, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class or socio-economic status;

2. including and representing in our work those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by the intersecting drivers of marginalisation and exclusion; and

3. embedding these commitments in our work through an intersectional approach which seeks to understand and address the overlapping and compounding ways in which people experience discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion.

In this context, this Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (**GEDSI**) Policy aims to ensure that Palmera undertakes its work through the lens of gender equality and social inclusion in order to:

- empower women and advance gender equality;

- empower people with disabilities and promote their human rights so they can achieve economic self-sufficiency, freedom, choice and dignity;

- protect and promote the rights and support the reintegration efforts of internally displaced persons; and

- ensure that other vulnerable groups are identified and included in Palmera's development efforts so that no one is left out.

This Policy aims to do so by:

1. setting out our **understanding** of how marginalisation and exclusion impacts our work;

2. establishing **guiding principles** on GEDSI so that we can make decisions and take actions that are consistent with our commitment to GEDSI; and

3. developing our **approach** to incorporating GEDSI considerations in all our development work and across all aspects of our organisation.

Understanding why GEDSI matters

The following table describes the context and barriers relevant to the drivers of discrimination most commonly present in the communities in which Palmera works.

Gender	Gender equality means the state in which individuals have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development, regardless of their sex and gender. It equally values the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society.[i]
	Achieving gender equality requires more than simply affording equal opportunity and treatment to men and women, girls and boys. To compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that have long affected women and girls, *gender equity* initiatives are necessary to truly place women and men on a level playing field.[ii]
	When women and girls are discriminated against and are excluded from accessing resources, services or productive activities, this not only affects their development, but it negatively affects a vulnerable community's capacity to increase its economic growth and development and to raise its living standards. Gender inequality therefore intensifies poverty, which in turn contributes to perpetuating cycles of gender inequality.
	Women bear a disproportionate burden of poverty and face many barriers to participating in income-generating activities. In addition, due to entrenched power imbalances and stereotypes, women and girls suffer disproportionately to men and boys in sexual and gender-based violence.
	In Sri Lanka, women are subject to social norms, childcare responsibilities, gender wage gaps and occupational segregation that dissuade and constrain women from participating in the labour force. In the war-affected regions of the north and east of the country, women continue to face particular hurdles resulting from the war, including: loss of the male partner and primary breadwinner, damage to household infrastructure in the war, child care responsibilities often as the sole parent, dislocation and displacement resulting in lost or destroyed assets, poor nutrition, psychological trauma, disruption in their schooling and development of skills during the war, loss of equipment, arable land, productive crops and livestock, and stigmatisation as women who need to work.[iii]
	By addressing gender inequality in our programs, Palmera has the opportunity to shatter negative stereotypes and attitudes regarding the participation of women in income-earning roles, and challenge the power imbalance and culture of discrimination that allows gender-based violence to continue.
Disability	A person with a disability is someone with an episodic or long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.[iv]
	People with disabilities make up 15% of the world's population and are the largest and most disadvantaged minority in the world.[v] People with disabilities and their families are more likely to be poor and to remain poor due to stigma, lack of accessibility, discrimination, higher living costs, barriers to education, health and employment opportunities, and unpaid caring responsibilities.

People with disabilities are also disproportionately affected by conflict and disaster. Their specific needs are often overlooked, such as mobility requirements, loss of assistive devices, and separation from carers and family.

In Sri Lanka, particularly in the war-affected areas of the north and east, the population remains affected by physical disabilities and psychological trauma (ex-combatants and war-widows). They face attitudinal and social barriers (such as social stigma) and physical barriers (such as a lack of access to places of employment) to securing livelihoods.

The explicit inclusion of people with disabilities as equal and active participants in development processes leads to broader benefits for families and communities and reduces the impacts of poverty. Disability inclusive development is therefore critical to Palmera achieving its goal of a world where no one is left out.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	IDPs are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.[vi]
	Even once they have returned to their homes or places of origins, IDPs are in need of certain assistance and sometimes protection during an interim period until they have reintegrated their communities.
	In Sri Lanka, years of (often multiple and consecutive) displacement have removed IDPs from their homes, lands, livelihoods, educational institutions and traditional social structures. Repeated and protracted deprivation of opportunities to support themselves have rendered IDPs reliant on external assistance to meet the basic necessities of life. IDPs also often carry with them the psychological trauma of conflict and upheaval. In addition, the inability to return to family properties due to military restrictions, and the reclamation or reassignment of their property leaves IDPs with uncertainty about their rights to access land resources for livelihoods.
	In some circumstances, IDPs have experienced decades of displacement and/or have been uprooted multiple times. Tens of thousands of IDPs have been resettled since the civil war ended in May 2009, however many continue to live in temporary shelters or temporary housing where safety and security concerns hinder their full participation in projects that are located away from their homes/shelters. As at December 2020, it is estimated that 27,000 people from the Northern and Eastern Provinces are yet to be resettled.[vii]
	Among those most affected by impoverishment resulting from displacement are families who were landless and poor prior to displacement and who had no significant assets. They also include families engaged in small-scale farming and/or fishing who were surviving independently before they were forced to flee, but whose income had not been sufficient to accumulate significant savings. Displacement deprived them of access to all or most of their main assets, including private or permit land and houses, agricultural crops, livestock and access to fishing grounds, boats and other fishing equipment.

The underdevelopment and lack of action to restore livelihood opportunities in the war-affected regions of the north and east mean that IDPs struggle to make ends meet and are trapped in poverty. Many have become dependent on aid for their survival and large numbers remain dependent on the support of host communities.

In order for Palmera to achieve its goal of a world where no one is left out, it is essential to find durable solutions for Sri Lanka's protracted IDPs as well as those returnees who are still not fully reintegrated into society and continue to live in poverty.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the complex and cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups.[viii]

For example:

- Women with disabilities are multiply disadvantaged, experiencing exclusion on the basis of their gender *and* disability.[ix] They are less likely than men with disabilities to have been enrolled in education, and much more likely to be victims of physical and sexual violence.[x]
- Because women disproportionately care for relatives with disability, having a family member with a disability can accentuate gender inequality and limit women and girls' opportunities for education and employment. This in turn reduces their ability to contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth.

In Sri Lanka, women IDPs in Sri Lanka are more vulnerable than men. Many of the women are landless, have few options in terms of housing solutions and livelihoods, and often work as daily labourers. Many used to live on public land before being displaced or cannot access their land. Land is used as a dowry by women in Sri Lanka, and many internally displaced women have given up hope of getting married owing to their lack of access to their land. Houses built to relocate single women headed households in the north are often isolated and some are incomplete, making women continuously vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence. Because very few members of the police speak Tamil, communication between IDPs and the police can be difficult and discouraging.[xi]

Palmera recognises that a meaningful approach to development must acknowledge the many ways in which persons may experience discrimination and face barriers to participation, and develop strategies to achieve their full and equal participation in the social and economic life of their communities.

Our GEDSI Guiding Principles

Palmera is guided by the following GEDSI principles which apply in all its decision-making and activities:

1. **We believe everyone has the right to equality and inclusion**
   All members of society have the equal rights and opportunities to participate as beneficiaries and agents of social and economic development, regardless of their identity. By focusing on these rights in all aspects of our decision-making and activities, we embed GEDSI into our work.

2. **We strive to address the root causes of inequality and marginalisation**
   Transformative change cannot be achieved by addressing the symptoms of discrimination, but rather, must tackle the root causes of it. This includes gaining a deep understanding of the drivers that cause marginalisation and exclusion, developing specific programs and strategies to overcome them, and challenging norms and stereotypes through our programs, practices and advocacy.

3. **We include the voices of marginalised groups**
   In our planning and decision-making, we incorporate the perspectives, experience, knowledge and interests of women and girls, people with disabilities, IDPs, and other relevant marginalised groups who are impacted by our work.

4. **We understand that each context is unique**
   Whether it is in our home base in Australia, or the countries where we undertake our development work, we operate in systems with structures that oppress and marginalise certain members of the community in intersecting ways. This means we cannot apply a one-size-fits-all solution, but instead must tailor our focus based on the specific context we are working in so as to develop GEDSI strategies that are effective in addressing and eliminating the root causes of inequity and exclusion. We do this by consulting with community members at all levels and from diverse backgrounds. In our own organisation we consult across our team to gain awareness of, and overcome the barriers that affect people involved in our work.

5. **We collaborate and share**
   We evaluate our experience and key learnings in order to improve our GEDSI approach and we share our learning with Partners and other organisations within the development sector so as to contribute to and benefit from the knowledge of best practice within the sector.

6. **We do no harm**
   At a minimum, Palmera's work must not cause discrimination to marginalised groups or reinforce the barriers to participation or negative stereotypes that keep people excluded from participating in the social and economic life of their communities. We have a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination on any grounds within our organisation.

Our GEDSI Approach

Palmera applies the above Guiding Principles to its work through the following approach:

1. **We collaborate with organisations who share our commitment to GEDSI**
   Palmera carries out its development activities through Partners on the ground who are instrumental at all phases of our programs. In order to undertake our development work with an effective GEDSI focus, we work with Partners who share our understanding and commitment to GEDSI, and support them in developing their GEDSI approach. This involves:
   - Selecting and working with implementing Palmera Partners who are committed to promoting GEDSI in their context;

- Assisting our Partners in assessing and building their own understanding of, and capacity to implement GEDSI in their work;
- Seeking input from experts and other civil society organisations to identify best practice and solutions for achieving equality and inclusion; and
- Looking for opportunities to engage other organisations who may be more able to address needs or issues that are beyond the scope of our organisational strategy or expertise.

2. **We design and implement programs that promote GEDSI**

We embed GEDSI in our programs by incorporating specific GEDSI considerations at all stages of the project cycle, and by applying a twin-track approach to program design, through which we:

- Assess GEDSI in our *main activities* (in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) to ensure that programs are inclusive, take into account the needs of marginalised people, do not discriminate against them, and do not reinforce inequalities and barriers to inclusion;
- Develop *targeted activities* where possible to address the specific needs of women, girls and other marginalised groups and help level the playing field to address structural and historical disadvantage and discrimination.

In line with the twin-track approach, we:

Program design and development
- Work with Partners during the concept development stage to identify the marginalised individuals and groups in the community, including women, people with disabilities, IDPs and other marginalised groups;
- Undertake a gender and disability analysis during the program appraisal process in order to understand the power dynamics within the community, the systemic causes of marginalisation and exclusion, and the ways in which vulnerable groups experience the problem;
- Consult with individuals across the spectrum of the target community, including women and girls, people with disabilities and/or their representatives, IDPs and any organisations that represent the interests of these groups to identify their needs and specific barriers to participation, and how they may be affected in intersecting ways in order to develop feasible tailored strategies to overcome their marginalisation and improve their opportunities and ability for social and economic participation in their communities;
- Consider whether GEDSI considerations are best addressed through integration within a mainstream activity, through targeted activities, or both, and tailor strategies and activities to address the differences in condition and needs for each group;
- Provide opportunities to individuals from those groups, including women and girls, people with disabilities and IDPs, to participate in and decision-making.

Monitoring
- Include measurable GEDSI-specific outcomes and indicators in the Activity Plan (used for monitoring and evaluating each program), including by collecting gender and disability disaggregated data in our programs;

Evaluation
- Evaluate programs to reflect on the GEDSI outcomes, discussing those evaluations with staff, Partners and relevant stakeholders and incorporating the lessons learned in future programs.

3. **We implement GEDSI in our organisation**

Palmera's commitment to GEDSI is reflected in the way we carry out our work, both at home in Australia and overseas in our development programs. We do this by:

- Developing a five-yearly GEDSI strategy to steer Palmera's GEDSI approach, and incorporating GEDSI considerations in our five-yearly Organisational and Country Strategies;
- Promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in the organisation by providing equal employment and volunteering opportunities within Palmera by removing unlawful barriers to participation;
- Fostering a gender and disability-sensitive workplace that is safe, which protects against discrimination and harassment in the workplace and which has accountability mechanisms to address harassment issues, as set out in our **Organisational Policy** and **Safeguarding Policy**;
- Ensuring that all Palmera Staff, Board members and any Partner Staff involved in Palmera activities understand and sign the **Organisational and Safeguarding Code of Conduct**;
- Utilising gender and disability inclusive language in our communications, and refraining from using language that reinforce negative stereotypes, in adherence with our **Ethical Communications Policy**.

4. **We hold ourselves accountable**

Our GEDSI approach will only be effective if we allow for feedback, reflection and growth. To achieve this, we:

- Provide locally appropriate, safe and confidential mechanisms for people to provide feedback and raise concerns or complaints about Palmera, its staff, volunteers, or activities, and those of its Partners—currently implemented through our **Safeguarding Policy** and **Complaints Handling and Whistleblowing Policy**.
- Periodically assess our own GEDSI practice in the organisation, the degree to which the policy is being implemented, and incorporating lessons learned into future policy and strategy design.

Reviewing this Policy

This policy is to be reviewed every three years, or earlier if appropriate, and lessons learned incorporated into subsequent versions.

Date	Version	Review Description	Reviewed By	Approved By
April 2021	1	Original	N/A	Board of Directors
September 2021	1.1	Revised to remove minor repetition in certain provisions	Policy Advisor	CEO
February 2026	1.2	Minor revisions to align with updates to Organisational and Safeguarding Code of Conduct	Legal	CEO

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[i] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, available at, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BSP/GENDER/PDF/1.%20Baseline%20Definitions%20of%20key%20gender-related%20concepts.pdf, last accessed 29 December 2020, p. 1.

ii United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, available at, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BSP/GENDER/PDF/1.%20Baseline%20Definitions%20of%20key%20gender-related%20concepts.pdf, last accessed 29 December 2020, p. 1.

iii International Centre for Ethnic Studies, "Women's Labour Force Participation in Sri Lanka's North", GrOW Working Paper Series, GWP-2018-18-Research Contribution Paper, last accessed 30 October 2020.

iv United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 1.

v United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities", last accessed 26 November 2020.

vi United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement", September 2004, last accessed 26 November 2020, p. 1.

vii Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Sri Lanka, last accessed 30 October 2020.

viii Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "intersectionality noun".

ix United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities", last accessed 26 November 2020.

x Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program, May 2015, p. 10.

xi Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Chaloka Beyani: Mission to Sri Lanka, 5 June 2014.